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Ranking Member, Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense, and Foreign
Operations
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives

Hearing on “U.S. Military Leaving Iraq: Is the State Department Ready?”

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Thank you, Chairman Chaffetz. And thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today. This is a topic that has been much-discussed, but it is well worth continued examination, particularly in light of the 2011 and 2012 budget discussions currently under way.

In 2008, the United States agreed to withdraw all U.S. troops from Iraq by the end of 2011. The U.S. military has stuck to that agreement and is on track to meeting the deadline.

After a heroic sacrifice over eight years that cost over 4,000 American lives and nearly one trillion dollars, the men and women of our armed forces can leave Iraq with their heads held high.

Now, the task is to make sure that our military’s hard-fought gains are not squandered, and that Iraq’s fragile stability is not lost. The President has charged the State Department with responsibility for supporting the stability and development of Iraq once our military has left.

The transition of operations to the State Department marks a new role for State, which is being asked to oversee functions traditionally under the purview of the Department of Defense.

Of particular concern are the State Department’s capabilities, both operationally and financially, to undertake activities traditionally managed by the Defense Department, and to oversee the expected increase in contractors operating in theater, all on a budget that is many orders of magnitude smaller.

However, simply because the State Department is taking on new functions, we cannot accept that contractors will entirely fill the void. One of my primary objectives in establishing the Wartime Contracting Commission was to ensure that contractors were not performing functions that are properly reserved for government personnel.

During the Oversight Committee’s last hearing on this subject, I discussed with Mr. Thibault the fundamental necessity of identifying inherently governmental functions leading up to this

transition. In spite of these concerns, in many respects, we are no closer to identifying and staffing inherently governmental positions than we were when hostilities in Iraq began eight years ago, and the transition in Iraq to an effort led by the State Department threatens to make this situation even worse.

Not only have inherently governmental functions not been clearly defined, but, according to reports, contracting has often become the “default option” for the State Department. It gives me little comfort that State is aware of the oversight and capacity problems it faces if it does not have the time or the financial resources to properly address them. As Mr. Green and Mr. Thibault state in their written testimony, “an expanded U.S. diplomatic presence in Iraq will require State to take on thousands of additional contractor employees that it has neither funds to pay nor resources to manage.”

Yesterday, the Commission on Wartime Contracting issued a report entitled “Iraq—A Forgotten Mission?” The report states that “without a substantial increase in budgetary support from Congress, the post-2011 prospects for Iraq—and for U.S. interests in the region—will be bleak.” It continues: “without increases to sustain operations for FY 2011 and beyond, it is inevitable that some missions and capabilities will be degraded or sacrificed altogether—and that large outlays of taxpayer funds will have been wasted.”

In fact, the Commission’s number one recommendation is that “Congress ensure adequate funding to sustain State Department operations in critical areas of Iraq.”

Unfortunately, today, Congress’s willingness to ensure adequate funding for the State Department’s mission in Iraq is very much in doubt. H.R. 1—the Republican-led appropriations bill that passed the House in February, dramatically cuts State Department funding overall and makes specific cuts to the major programs that are critical to the mission in Iraq.

According to Secretary Clinton, who testified yesterday in front of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, “the 16 percent cut for State and USAID that passed the House last month would be devastating to our national security [and] it would force us to scale back dramatically on critical missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.”

This is the definition of “penny wise and pound foolish.” After investing so much blood and nearly a trillion dollars in Iraq, we must give the State Department the basic resources they need in order to successfully relieve the military of their mission there and help ensure Iraq’s stability and future prosperity.

Indeed, the State Department effort in Iraq is vastly more affordable than the operation led by the Defense Department. As Ambassador Kennedy notes in his testimony, withdrawing the U.S. military from Iraq will save \$51 billion in FY 2012 while the State Department is only seeking a roughly \$2.5 billion increase in its budget to take over many of those same responsibilities. I understand that

It is important for this Subcommittee to continue to scrutinize the transition, but we must now also look at it in the context of proposed budget cuts that would fundamentally undermine the State Department’s ability to successfully achieve its new responsibilities.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.